

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMCONSUL SAO PAULO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8705
INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, PIN, BR
SUBJ: STRIKE BY MEDICAL INTERNS PARTIALLY SUCCESSFUL

1. SUMMARY: WORK STOPPAGES BY HOSPITAL INTERNS IN RIO AND SAO PAULO PROTESTING THEIR LOW PAY AND LONG HOURS ATTRACTED CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC ATTENTION BUT AFFECTED ONLY SMALL PROPORTION OF MEDICAL SERVICES AVAILABLE TO PUBLIC. STRIKE HAS BEEN SUSPENDED IN SAO PAULO AND RIO WHILE NEGOTIATIONS CONTINUE IN BOTH CITIES. END SUMMARY.

2. HOSPITALS HIT BY LABOR UNREST: WORK STOPPAGES AFFECTED PUBLIC HOSPITAL SERVICES INTERMITTENTLY IN SEVERAL OF BRAZIL'S PRINCIPAL CITIES OVER THE PAST THREE WEEKS. THE STRIKES DID NOT AFFECT PRIVATE OR PHILANTHROPIC HOSPITALS, WHICH TOGETHER MAKE UP TWO-THIRDS OF BRAZIL'S HOSPITAL BED CAPACITY. THE WAVE OF STRIKES WAS SPARKED PRIMARILY BY MEDICAL INTERNS TO STRENGTHEN THEIR DEMANDS FOR HIGHER PAY. SETTLEMENT OF THE DISPUTES WAS COMPLICATED BY THE BRAZILIAN SYSTEM OF FEDERAL, STATE AND MUNICIPAL HOSPITALS EACH HAVING INTERNS WORKING UNDER DIFFERENT CONDITIONS, AND BY CONFUSION AS TO WHETHER INTERNS ARE IN A "TRAINING" OR "PROFESSION STATUS. MINISTER OF HEALTH ALMEIDA MACHADO GRANTED INTERNS AT FEDERALLY SUPPORTED HOSPITALS INCREASES

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TO 7,000 CRUZEIROS PER MONTH (APPROXIMATELY 390 DOLLARS) SHORTLY AFTER THE UNREST BEGAN, BUT STATE AND MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES IN SAO PAULO AND RIO DE JANEIRO CLAIMED THEY COULD NOT MATCH THIS SETTLEMENT FOR INTERNS UNDER THEIR JURISDICTIONS. SOME HOSPITAL STAFF DOCTORS IN RIO AND SAO PAULO ALSO USED THE SITUATION TO THEIR OWN ADVANTAGE TO PRESS THE GOVERNMENT FOR HIGHER WAGES AT THE RATE OF TEN "MINIMUM SALARIES" PER MONTH (APPROXIMATELY

944 DOLLARS) FOR TWENTY FOUR HOURS PER WEEK. IN ADDITION TO SAO PAULO AND RIO, MINOR STRIKES OF INTERNS HAVE OCCURRED OR BEEN THREATENED IN PORTO ALEGRE AND BELO HORIZONTE.

3. WORK STOPPAGES MOST SERIOUS IN RIO: UNREST COMMENCED IN RIO IN LATE JUNE, WHEN INTERNS OF FEDERAL, STATE, AND MUNICIPAL HOSPITALS STOPPED WORK AND DEMONSTRATED FOR HIGHER WAGES. ALTHOUGH THE 1,200 INTERNS IN THE FEDERALLY SUPPORTED HOSPITALS SUBSEQUENTLY RECEIVED INCREASES, RIO STATE GOVERNOR FARIA LIMA AND RIO MAYOR MARCOS TAMOIO REFUSED TO AGREE TO SIMILAR INCREASES FOR INTERNS OF STATE AND MUNICIPALLY SUPPORTED HOSPITALS. AN IMPASSE IN RIO WAS REACHED ON JULY 23 WHEN 444 INTERNS WHO REFUSED TO RETURN TO WORK IN STATE SUPPORTED HOSPITALS WERE CONSIDERED "TO HAVE DISMISSED THEMSELVES" FROM THEIR INTERNSHIPS. NEGOTIATIONS HOWEVER, REPORTEDLY ENCOURAGED FROM BRASILIA, PERMITTED THE EVENTUAL REINTEGRATION OF THESE INTERNS. THE NEARLY 800 STATE AND MUNICIPAL INTERNS SUSPENDED THEIR 17 DAY STRIKE ON JULY 29 TO ALLOW A THREE WEEK NEGOTIATING PERIOD IN WHICH TO DISCUSS THEIR DEMANDS. IN THE MEANTIME, THEIR WAGES HAVE BEEN INCREASED FROM THE PREVIOUS LEVEL OF 3,000 CRUZEIROS TO 4,689 CRUZEIROS PER MONTH (APPROXIMATELY 260 DOLLARS).

4. NEGOTIATIONS SUSPEND SAO PAULO STRIKE: INTERNS IN TWO OF SAO PAULO'S STATE SUPPORTED TEACHING HOSPITALS, WHO WERE JOINED BY 7,500 NON-PROFESSIONAL STAFF, ENDED THEIR WEEK LONG WORK STOPPAGE JULY 22 AFTER GOVERNOR EGYDIO MARTINS AGREED TO INTERIM LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INCREASES OF 40 PERCENT AND ESTABLISHED A NEGOTIATING BOARD TO CONSIDER THEIR DEMANDS AND REPORT BY AUGUST 8.

5. BASIC CAUSES FOR DOCTOR'S DISCONTENT: LOW WAGES AND LONG HOURS ARE THE IMMEDIATE COMPLAINT. INTERNS AT STATE HOSPITALS IN RIO WERE RECEIVING 166 DOLLARS A MONTH FOR A 60 HOUR WEEK. IN ADDITION, NEWLY TRAINED PHYSICIANS ARE FACED WITH SEVERAL FACTORS WHICH HAVE ALTERED THE PRACTICE OF MEDICINE IN RECENT YEARS. IN 1960 SOME 1,500 PHYSICIANS GRADUATED. BY 1970, THE NUMBER INCREASED TO 6,000 AND BY 1975 TO 8,300. THE INCREASE IN THE SUPPLY HAS BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY INCREASED DEMAND FOR LOW COST MEDICAL SERVICES, USUALLY PROVIDED BY CLINICS. THE RESULT IS THE MAJORITY OF PHYSICIANS ARE NOW SOLELY DEPENDENT UPON WAGES FROM CONTRACT EMPLOYMENT WITH TWO OR MORE CLINICS, A MARKED SHIFT FROM THE MORE LUCRATIVE PRIVATE PRACTICES PREVALENT IN THE PAST. THIS DECLINE IN PROSPECTIVE EARNINGS FROM A MEDICAL CAREER IS ONE FACTOR SPARKING THE CURRENT DISCONTENT AMONG INTERNS.

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6. MEDICAL SERVICES NOT DRASTICALLY CURTAILED: WHILE THE STRIKES HAVE RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC ATTENTION, MEDICAL SERVICES OVERALL ARE NOT BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN SERIOUSLY CURTAILED. EMERGENCY SERVICES CONTINUED TO BE AVAILABLE EVEN AT THE HOSPITALS AFFECTED BY THE STOPPAGES. AT THE TIME OF AMBASSADOR ELLIOT RICHARDSON'S VISIT TO SAO PAULO, JULY 20, STATE GOVERNOR EGYDIO MARTINS TOLD THE AMBASSADOR AND LABATT THAT HE WAS NOT SERIOUSLY CONCERNED AS THE TWO HOSPITALS AFFECTED BY LABOR PROBLEMS REPRESENTED ONLY 3,000 OF THE 60,000 BED TOTAL AVAILABLE IN THE STATE. IN ADDITION, THE INTERNS WERE STILL PREDOMINATLY IN A TRAINING CAPACITY WITH RATIO OF ONE INTERN TO EVERY TWO PATIENTS.

7. COMMENT: THE RESPONSE BY THE VARIOUS GOVERNMENTAL ENTITIES TO THE INTERNS' DEMANDS HAS SEEMED SUPRISINGLY UNCOORDINATED. THE HEALTH MINISTRY'S PROMPT GRANTING OF A 7,000 CRUZEIRO A MONTH STIPEND TO INTERNS UNDER ITS JURISTICTION CERTAINLY ACTED AS AN INCENTIVE FOR STATE AND MUNICIPALLY FUNDED INTERNS TO STRIKE FOR EQUAL TREATMENT. BRASILIA'S DESIRE TO CALM THE ISSUE IS UNDOUBTEDLY INFLUENCED BY ELECTIONYEAR POLITICS, WHICH WOULD ALSO ACCOUNT FOR THE REPORTED PRESSURE ON RIO GOVERNOR FARIA LIMA TO EASE HIS HARDLINE STANCE AND READMIT THE 444 INTERNS DISMISSED BY THE STATE. WHILE IT APPEARED EARLIER THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD

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SET A TROUBLESOME PRECEDENT FOR ITSELF BY APPEARING TO YEILD TO STRIKE PRESSURES, THIS HAS BEEN AVOIDEDBY HEALTH MINISTER ALMEIDA MACHADO'S ANNOUNCEMENT ON JULY 29 THAT FEDERALLY FUNDED INTERSHIPS WOULD BE GRANTED IN THE FUTURE ONLY TO THOSE WISHING TO GO INTO

UNPOPULAR ADVANCED SPECIALTIES SUCH AS PATHEOLOGY, TUBERCULOSIS,
AND HANSEN'S DESEASE. IN SHORT, THE INTERNS HAVE RECEIVED SOME
IMMEDIATE SHORT TERM IMPROVEMENTS IN THEIR WAGES BUT IT SEEMS LIKELY
THAT THEY WILL HAVE TO SETTLE FOR LESS THAN THEY ORIGINALLY
HOPED TO GAIN.
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